

NETWORK STUDIES FOR THE ALBERTA PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTORS' COUNCIL (APLDC)

SUMMARY PREPARED BY THE COMMITTEE MONITORING THE STUDIES ON THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF AUTOMATING LIBRARY PROCESSES IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED LIBRARIES DONE BY LMG.

The specifications drawn up by the Network Studies' Committee, APLDC, focused on five areas. The studies meet the specifications set out. Each study includes an executive summary and a longer summary in conclusion. A large number of recommendations appear throughout the reports. Some arise from the data and others from the current environment of library automation. While each report is relatively self-contained, they should be used as an integrated series, in order to obtain the most useful information and impact. Because of the pressures of time, a small number of typographical errors survived. An errata sheet and an addenda sheet, plus sources of documentation, will be provided to supplement the studies. The survey instrument is added as an appendix to the first study.

I: THE AUTOMATION OF SMALLER PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN ALBERTA

This study examines the range of current costs in libraries in Alberta, for a number of functions. Comparisons with costs elsewhere have been made. In general, the Alberta public library costs were equal to, or somewhat lower than, those of other libraries studied. A number of suggestions for improved manual systems have been made, and some discussion of their costs is provided. The costs of substituting automated systems for present manual operations are also included. The conditions under which public libraries should consider automating are discussed, and a cost-benefit analysis model for comparative evaluation of present and proposed new systems is included.

Assessment:

The study is the longest one of the five and meets the specifications set out, with the exception of the cost ranges for improved manual systems. Because of the widely varying costs for a number of library functions currently carried out, and the improvements which could be made in manual methods, the consultants have wisely avoided being dogmatic about whether to automate or not. All necessary factors for arriving at policy decisions by individual libraries are included. Some of the pertinent costs which have to be considered are included in other reports. Each library seriously considering automation will need to carry out the use of the cost-benefit analysis model and arrive at conclusions related to its own operation. The most fruitful area for automating operations appears to be circulation. However, the model, while it can be used by a wide variety of libraries, is complex to use. Study sessions in its effective use would be valuable to all sections of the library community.

II: MICROCOMPUTERS FOR AUTOMATING BASIC LIBRARY OPERATIONS

The study investigates the availability of microcomputer-based systems for the automation of common library functions. Thirteen possible systems were identified and reviewed. They range from very inexpensive systems, which

could be implemented for less than \$10,000, to systems costing over \$100,000. Systems were reviewed for functions provided, capacity, hardware requirements, price, product generation, maintenance and installation, communications' capabilities, and other matters. Several systems appear promising for Alberta libraries. In particular, school libraries and small public libraries appear to have available several working systems.

Assessment:

Sufficient details, particularly costs, have been given to allow interested libraries to focus on systems most pertinent to their needs. Locations of installed systems are given and the addresses, etc., of vendors. It should be a relatively easy matter for libraries to send requests for information to the vendors, using their responses in the cost-benefit analysis. Probable length of time and costs for data conversion are understandably not detailed for each of the micro-systems. A comparison can be made between various options and current costs, and a decision made on the next stage to be analysed.

III: MINICOMPUTER-BASED SYSTEMS FOR LIBRARY AUTOMATION

The Network Studies' Committee recognized that the larger target libraries' needs exceeded the capabilities of microcomputers while at the same time a stand-alone mini-based computer system would be too expensive. Therefore, this study was required to focus on shared installations, which help to reduce costs. The study looks at five shared installations, using five different vendor-systems and provides detailed information on all aspects. The study shows the advantages enjoyed by the members of a regional system. Cost-savings for members of a multi-library co-operative are addressed, along with some of the problems of co-operating, especially in governance.

Assessment:

Sufficient information is given to enable libraries, which wish to co-operate jointly in a mini-based computer system, to focus on possible options and to make the necessary decisions.

IV: COMPARATIVE COSTS FOR CATALOGUING SERVICES

The automation of library operations focuses generally on three areas: circulation control, shared cataloguing copy, and interlibrary-loan improvements. The Network Studies' Committee required an examination of comparative costs for cataloguing services from automated environments as well as other sources. Costs of obtaining cataloguing copy from UTLAS and other bibliographic utilities, as well as a number of commercial vendors, are discussed. Components of the cataloguing process are outlined, and various hidden costs explained. The study discusses the various sources, including analyses of



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the scope of databases, methods of access, prices, options available, retrospective conversion considerations, and other matters.

Assessment:

A significant difference between the costs of commercial services and bibliographical utilities appear; one which the consultants appear to gloss over. However, those libraries which use a variety of commercial services, carrying out the necessary additional work (which bibliographic utilities carry out directly), recognize that it still does not increase the cost of commercial vendors significantly. The difference in cost and services should receive detailed discussion within the Province.

V: POTENTIAL FUTURE INTERLIBRARY LOAN TRAFFIC AMONG ALBERTA LIBRARIES

A comparison of interlibrary loan traffic in Alberta, British Columbia, Great Britain, and other various areas of Europe and the United States, shows that a distinction can be drawn between relatively advanced and underdeveloped systems. Population projections for Alberta are examined and a number of possible scenarios for the future growth of interlibrary-loan traffic in Alberta are developed. Probable associated costs are given, as well as very specific loan-traffic statistics for a number of possibilities.

Assessment:

Ample information is given to enable useful discussions to take place. The probable volume of public library interlibrary-loan traffic under various conditions will have a direct bearing on network solutions and should receive full discussion. Since most ILL traffic is generated by academic libraries, their involvement in such discussions will be vital.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Extensive debate will be needed to arrive at a general consensus about networking in Alberta, using all the studies to date including the Schick Report. Workshops and other methods of studying the reports and recommendations, and using the cost-benefit analysis model, should be fostered by various stake-holders in the library community.

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